

STALKING AND HARASSMENT

Guidance for Parliamentarians

Offenders engaging in stalking behaviour can follow a path that ultimately can lead to homicide.

Definition

There is no legal definition of stalking. However, it is generally accepted that it includes repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and/or contacts on another in a manner that could be expected to cause distress and/or fear in any reasonable person.

Stalking behaviour

Taken in isolation behaviours might seem unremarkable. But in the particular circumstance and with repetition, they take on a more sinister meaning.

The context and details of the behaviours and the underlying motivation are crucial to understanding the risks that the stalker poses to a victim.

Unwanted communications may include telephone calls, letters, e-mails, faxes, sms text messages, sending or leaving unsolicited materials/gifts, graffiti, and/or messages on social networking sites.

Unwanted intrusions include following, waiting for, spying on, approaching, accosting and going to a person's home. In addition to unwanted communication and intrusion, the stalker may engage in a number of associated behaviours including ordering or cancelling goods/services, making vexatious complaints (to legitimate bodies), cyberstalking (use of the internet to facilitate the behaviour), threats, property damage and violence.

What do we know about stalking?
According to the British Crime Survey (2006), up to 1 in 5 citizens will experience stalking in the UK in their lifetime and approximately five million people experience stalking in any given year.

- The majority of stalkers are known to their victims either as ex-partners or acquaintances, but some people are stalked by complete strangers.
- Around 80% of stalkers are male. However, stalkers and their victims can be of either gender.
- Stalkers come from all backgrounds and do not form one 'type'. Stalkers are not homogenous and the motivation for stalking can vary.
- Understanding the motivation is important when assessing the risks the stalker may pose.
- Many victims will experience multiple, repeated stalking behaviours before they report this to the police.
- Stalking is life changing. It is frequently injurious to victims' psychological, physical and social functioning, irrespective of whether they are physically assaulted. The majority of stalking victims experience symptoms of traumatic stress and other forms of psychological, social and vocational damage.

On average, 21 people connected to the victim will be affected. Therefore, secondary victims will be identified. Stalkers will involve third parties for a number of reasons including to: upset the victim; obtain information on the victim; remove perceived obstacles between the stalker and victim, and/or to punish those perceived as helping or shielding the victim.

Guidance for MPs

DO

- **Listen to what the victim has to say.**
- **Advise the victim to go to the police as soon as possible.**
- Reassure the victim that the police do want to help. Many have not yet been trained in stalking.
- Take notes about what has been disclosed and store them securely. Ensure they are confidential and staff are advised not to disclose any information to anyone other than the police.
- **Consider writing a letter to the police on behalf of the victim.**
- Ensure they keep a diary of all stalking incidents, retain all messages, gifts etc.
- **Advise the constituent to fill in the Member of Parliament's stalking questionnaire – which can be downloaded at www.stalkinghelpline.org.** It only takes a few minutes to complete. Fill it in with the constituent; if there is an answer of yes to any of the questions, the constituent should be advised to go to the police station. Please try to contact the local police station in support.
- **Advise the victim to call the National Stalking Helpline.**

DO NOT

- **Send the victim away believing that it is not serious** or say that they are lucky to receive this level of attention.
- **Tell the victim to change their phone number.** This will not stop the behaviour – they will find another means of contact.
- **Suggest that the victim talk/meet with the stalker to resolve issues.**
- Write/e-mail the victim about what they have disclosed. It may not be safe. Ask them for a safe way for you to contact them.

Useful Contacts & Organisations

National Stalking Helpline

T: 0300 636 0300

W: www.stalkinghelpline.org

E: advice@stalkinghelpline.org

Protection Against Stalking (PAS)

E: info@protectionagainststalking.org

W: www.protectionagainststalking.org

Network for Surviving stalking (NSS)

W: www.nss.org.uk

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